

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Jan Begger and I am representing Alternatives, Inc from Billings, MT, specifically the Passages Women's Correctional Program. We are a non-profit organization assisting offenders re-enter the community.

Alternatives opened for male offenders in 1980 and we added the female facility in 2007. Since that time we have had an outstanding relationship with our local Job Service. At any given time we can have approximately 250 of our male and female clients working in the community and every one of them have been touched by Job Service in some way. This group is often less educated, have been out of the work force for extended periods of time and often have chemical dependency and mental health issues. You probably think that they have difficulty finding jobs – but Job Service staff come to our facilities and provides training on such things as interviewing techniques, soft skills, and resumes writing. We also take our residents to the Job Services Center where they meet the staff, are provided with resources and are shown how to use the computers to register for jobs. This is very helpful in breaking down the barrier of going somewhere that maybe unknown and intimidating. All of these things assist in our clients securing and maintain employment, most with-in a couple of weeks, and assisting in successful, long-term re-entry. We have an excellent relationship with the staff and continue to be very appreciative of their support.

Recently we have partnered with the DOLI, Mark Maki and Mike Cooney on a project with our Culinary Arts Program. With their assistance and direction we were awarded the first formally recognized Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program in the State of Montana. Our CAP program takes female offenders from the MWP and provides them with 2000 hours of work experience and 288 hours of related instruction. Our goal for this program is to provide offenders with the opportunity to learn a trade and develop a career plan that will aid in them finding employment that offers a living wage and benefits. The program with the help of the entire DOLI program has succeeded beyond our hopes. This is an opportunity for the women not only to find gainful employment, but for those wishing to further their skills training their credits are transferable to an apprenticeship program.

In recognition of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Appreciation Programs nationwide, The DOLI then nominated our program for a national award and in July 2012 we were one of five programs recognized as a "Trailblazer and Innovator" and had the opportunity to go to Washington, DC and be recognized by then Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis. Our program is unique in that it not only offers culinary arts training, but also combines many treatment components that offenders need to address for successful re-entry. We were the only nationally recognized program that works with current inmates in this capacity.

Some of you may have attended the reception that our students prepared in January. We appreciated the opportunity to showcase their skills and knowledge. We are extremely appreciative of the partnership that we have locally and here in Helena with the DOLI and sincerely hope that you consider their budget requests.